

SAN FRANCISCO BAY CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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May 21, 2008

**SUBJECT: Preparing for Rising Sea Level in the Bay Area, a Local Government Forum,
April 16, 2008, Small Group Feedback on Vulnerability Assessment Template Exercise**

TO: Vulnerability Assessment Template Exercise Facilitators and Participants

Summary

This report summarizes the comments from participants in small group breakout sessions for the Vulnerability Assessment Template exercise, a component of the Preparing for Sea Level Rise in the Bay Area forum. The feedback was provided to facilitators and recorders during the forum break out sessions and later in response to an online survey administered by the San Francisco Bay Estuarine Research Reserve (SFBNERR). The forum was hosted by BCDC, ABAG, the San Francisco Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District on April 16, 2008. This forum opened a dialogue among Bay Area local governments and other parties of interest regarding the steps that should be taken to address projected sea level rise in the Bay Area resulting from climate change. The vulnerability assessment template exercise introduced the concept of a vulnerability/risk assessment of potential climate change effects to local government staff and regional stakeholders. Feedback from the exercise will be used to refine the template and produce materials to assist local governments to conduct vulnerability assessments in the Bay Area.

Forum attendees were assigned to breakout sessions of approximately 15-20 participants that were moderated by BCDC staff. Each participant was provided with a 10-page assessment workbook and a fact sheet detailing a fictional city that was used to complete the workbook. All six breakout groups completed the exercise and provided feedback to BCDC staff about the template and exercise.

Many participants agreed that conducting a vulnerability/risk assessment for climate change is a worthwhile exercise for Bay Area local governments and agencies. Participants recognized that the template model used in the exercise could be useful for evaluating a broad range of community vulnerabilities in addition to sea level rise, such as wildfire, drought and frequent high-heat days. Participants also noted that the matrix format allowed participants to easily analyze interrelationships between systems. Another positive was that the model would allow a diverse audience without extensive specialized training to complete the exercise.

At the conclusion of the session, and later online, participants had the opportunity to suggest improvements for the exercise and template. Some participants thought that the fictional city scenarios used in the exercise were too simplified and that more information was needed, for example, on the regulatory environment of the fictional city and also regional



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interactions between cities/districts. It was also suggested that using a real-life example in the exercise might produce a better result.

Some participants expressed concern that this vulnerability assessment process will not result in an objective analysis and that the assumptions will bias the result. Others opined that this process does not provide a better way of identifying priority planning areas than simply polling a stakeholder group. While some participants thought that the process had the potential to produce an objective analysis, other participants specifically wanted places where subjective judgments could be included in the analysis. Specific suggestions for additional subjective inputs to the template included places for ranking societal values, importance of the system to the community, political will and financial cost.

Some commented that the template definitions of sensitivity, vulnerability and risk were too similar. Some participants experienced considerable difficulty with Task 4, the risk analysis step, and suggested that additional refinement will be needed to clarify the concept and the risk rating system. Some participants were in favor of changing the high, medium, low rating system to a numerical system. Although the presentation method for the forum exercise was constrained by limited space, participants suggested using a computer and projector for future exercises so that the team could fill out the template, and common answers could be more easily entered into multiple boxes.

Participants also provided feedback on what information they would need to complete a vulnerability assessment using this template in their local government/agency. Determining these data gaps will help regional agencies and partners prioritize research areas and funding for research. A major data gap identified is the lack of regional models/scenarios/predictions for climate change in the Bay Area. Participants suggested that information is also needed on the biogeochemical cycles in the Bay Area and the changes to this system that might occur with climate change.

Overall the vulnerability assessment template exercise was successful and most participants agreed that the exercise was useful and applicable to their work and planning processes. Several planners from local governments stated that they would use the resources provided in the reference list and the experience from the exercise to try to complete a vulnerability assessment for their local municipalities. Most participants were enthusiastic about BCDC incorporating their feedback and recommendations for the template to produce a vulnerability assessment handbook that would guide local governments, agencies and districts through a vulnerability assessment and developing a climate change preparedness plan. A final comment was that the vulnerability assessments should take place at both a local and regional level so that priority issues can be identified and prioritized regionally instead of addressing issues solely at the local level.